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Measure would make property tax appeal process fairer

Common sense legislation that will make the process fairer for homeowners interested in appealing their property taxes was recently approved by the Senate Finance Committee.

Senate Bill 395 will require property tax assessment notices to be sent to property owners at least two weeks before the meeting by the board of review, which is the appeal deadline. Under current Michigan law, notices of property tax assessment increases must be mailed out just 10 days before a scheduled board of review meeting.

Several additional measures to aid property owners are under consideration by the Legislature, including a bill that would allow Michigan residents to appeal by letter rather than in person, and Senate Joint Resolution H. SJR H would amend the state constitution to prevent an individual's residential property taxes from increasing if the home value has fallen during the same period.

SB 395 would not affect current year tax assessments and now goes to the full Senate for further consideration. SJR H is currently before the House Tax Policy Committee.

Senate bills cracking down on voter registration fraud

Legislation to stop fraudulent voter registration applications was recently approved by the Michigan Senate. Understanding that free elections that are fair, open and honest are the cornerstone of our country, the Senate measures would help stop fraud at the polls.

Senate Bills 694 and 695 specify that it is illegal for any person to knowingly submit a fraudulent or forged voter registration application to the secretary of state or any clerk, and they provide for a punishment of up to five years in prison and a \$5,000 fine.

The measures are part of a Senate Republican plan designed to protect voters, their rights and the value of their vote by preventing election fraud. Instances of voter registration fraud have drastically increased in recent elections. ACORN, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, has been charged in several states with registration fraud.

According to an October 2008 article in The Economist, "in Orlando, home to the Magic Kingdom of Disney, Mickey Mouse tried to register. In Indiana there was an application from a sandwich shop called Jimmy Johns. Authorities in Nevada were surprised to receive voter registration forms from the starting line-up of the Dallas Cowboys."

SBs 692 and 693 establish criminal penalties for any individual or organization attempting to compensate people for voting or refraining from voting, or registering or refraining from registering to vote. SBs 692-695 and 999 have been sent to the House for consideration.

Senate Republicans introduce bills to ensure registration of all sex offenders

Legislation designed to help ensure that all sex offenders are registered with the state by establishing requirements for homeless sex offenders was recently introduced in the Senate.

Senate Republicans began working on Senate Bills 1206-1209 following the Michigan Court of Appeals' ruling in February that homeless sex offenders do not have to register because they do not have a "residence" as defined by law.

The purpose of the Sex Offender Registration Act (SORA) was to help keep track of all sex offenders. The state must fix this problem with the registry, so that all sex offenders are included in the system, whether they have a residence or not.

SB 1206 would require homeless individuals to comply with the SORA and provides requirements for registering. SB 1207 would require the public registry to identify homeless individuals as without residence, so that residents will know they are homeless but in the area.

The appeals court's ruling on the case, *People of the State of Michigan vs. Randall Lee Dowdy*, stemmed from Dowdy arguing he could not register with the SORA because he was homeless. According to registry records, 61-year-old Dowdy was convicted of five counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct.

Adoption bills approved by Michigan Senate

Legislation designed to help speed up adoptions and guardianships was recently approved by the Michigan Senate. Senate Bills 891, 892 and 893 would allow the Michigan Children's Institute superintendent within the Michigan Department of Human Services to authorize a designee to approve adoptions or guardianships for children who are wards of the state.

Some children have a permanent home waiting for them; and all they need is this consent from the state. The goal is to help put children into permanent homes more quickly.

When parental rights are involuntarily terminated by the court or voluntarily relinquished after child protective proceedings have been initiated, the child becomes a ward of the state and the MCI superintendent becomes the child's legal guardian. The superintendent must give consent before a child can be adopted or have a guardian appointed.

In 2008, Michigan Supreme Court Justice Maura Corrigan and DHS Director Ismael Ahmed held a forum to identify barriers to adoption. Delays in receiving the MCI superintendent's consent was identified as a common obstacle to adoption.

Contact information

Thank you for your interest in our current state issues. If you would like to receive future legislative updates via e-mail, or have any questions or concerns, please contact my office at sen22@senate.michigan.gov or by calling 800-516-0026. You can also visit me in my Lansing office S-132 State Capitol Building Lansing, Michigan.

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